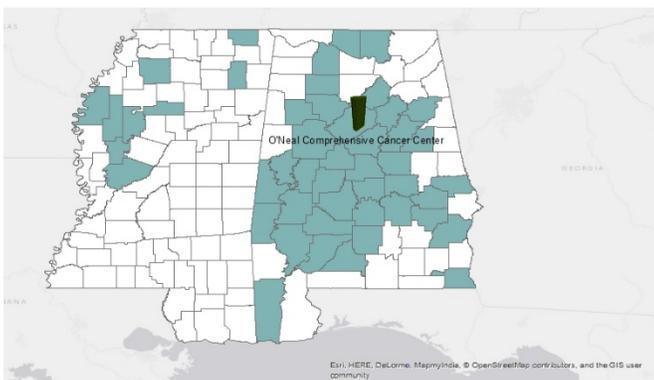


Community Outreach and Engagement O’Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham

Catchment Area

The O’Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) serves the entire state of Alabama. Alabama has the eighth highest overall cancer mortality rate, at 204.4 deaths per 100,000 total population.

1. The state includes 67 counties and is home to almost 5 million people. The population includes 68 percent non-Hispanic white, 27 percent non-Hispanic Black, and 4 percent Hispanic individuals. Approximately 41 percent of the catchment population lives in a rural area, and 59 percent live in an area that is medically underserved.
2. The O’Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center patient population is mostly from our geographic catchment area (91 percent) and reflects the demographics of the state. One in four patients are a racial/ethnic minority, and more than two-thirds are medically underserved.



Community Engagement Focus

The O’Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center has long been a leader in understanding and addressing racial and geographic disparities. For over 25 years, our cancer

center has focused on eliminating persistent health disparities in our state and region by forming strategic national, state, and community partnerships; engaging medically underserved communities (particularly African American and rural); and conducting research, training, and public education. The nationally recognized model for cancer outreach, engagement, and dissemination of evidence-based interventions utilizes the Community Health Advisors (CHAs) model. The CHA model is grounded in the identification and training of volunteer lay workers to help educate the public on cancer disparities, cancer prevention, early detection, and healthy lifestyles. CHAs and staff (community navigators) link community members to age-appropriate screening and care. Over 1,500 CHAs in 26 counties have been trained and have implemented culturally tailored cancer outreach, education, and research activities.

In discussions with community stakeholders and partners in preparation for the pilot program, we identified the need for additional community education about and access to clinical trials and precision medicine to improve screening/diagnostics, care, and survivorship among populations at highest cancer risk.

At a Glance

Our goal was to develop, pilot, and evaluate a one-year program to increase capacity to support the translational research continuum from basic science to community health.

Collaborators

Office of Community Outreach & Engagement (OCOE)

The OCOE supports catchment-relevant transdisciplinary research across the cancer continuum by prioritizing

research support on seven specific cancers (brain, breast, cervical, colorectal, lung, Multiple Myeloma, and prostate). In addition, we support community-based, behavioral lifestyle interventions targeting diet, nutrition, physical activity, tobacco control, and other behaviors that lower cancer risk and/or improve cancer survival. Our multi-level approach combines scientific research, evidence-based practice, data collection, and grassroots community activities to disseminate vital health information that is culturally appropriate and matches the health literacy of our broad target audience.

The OCOE collaborates with transdisciplinary researchers, healthcare providers, and non-profit community-based agencies, in addition to state and local groups and organizations, to deliver messages to specific audiences within the catchment area.

Experimental Therapeutics (ET) Research Program

The ET Research Program is one of three research programs in the O'Neal Cancer Center and includes nearly 80 core members. The goal of the ET Research Program is to develop novel therapeutic strategies that provide cancer patients with an opportunity for a cure, enhanced survival time, slowed disease progression, and improved quality of life. Over the past five years, this program has included 461 therapeutic trials and recruited participants from all 67 counties in our geographic catchment area. Clinical trials accrual also consistently includes an average of 58 percent females and 20 percent racial/ethnic minorities.



Community Stakeholders: Community Advisory Board (CAB)

The CAB is a 22-member group that includes racial, sexual, and gender minority members; rural residents; cancer survivors; and persons from low-income backgrounds from across our catchment.

The CAB helps set the course of the work of the OCOE and holds the O'Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center leadership accountable for engagement and its mission to reduce the cancer burden and associated disparities.

Partnering Organization: Housing Authority of Birmingham District (HABD)

The HABD provides affordable housing for qualified low- and moderate-income families in the City of Birmingham. They serve nearly 5,000 families in public housing and are charged with providing education/service, self-sufficiency, personal growth, financial literacy and health/wellness programs to its residents.

The Approach

Establish a new collaboration between the OCOE, the ET Research Program, and community stakeholders.

To ensure successful bidirectional communication between members of the OCOE, ET, and community stakeholders, we cemented the value of this type of communication across all parties, embraced a shared goal, established rules of engagement, identified and translated common terminology used by each party, and developed implementation practices. We developed and conducted a four-session training program for OCOE and basic scientists to facilitate knowledge transfer and skills acquisition to support ongoing collaboration leading to high-impact science of relevance to our catchment area. In addition, OCOE, ET, and CAB leaders continue to meet regularly to achieve our capacity-building goal. OCOE members participate in scheduled monthly research program seminars, and research program leaders participate in quarterly CAB meetings with OCOE staff.

Enhance an established community-based cancer educational program to include tailored basic science information matching the health literacy of the audience.

We enhanced our established community-based education program that focused on cancer prevention to include information on basic science, precision medicine, and clinical trials tailored for audiences connected with our HABD community partner. We held virtual educational sessions with our partner. Sessions were co-facilitated by OCOE and basic scientists completing the capacity-building training program. Tailored materials were developed with collaboration from COE, ET, and CAB members, and input from our communications specialists were distributed at HABD residences and electronically.

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Cervical cancer is a serious subject... However, “just the facts” presentations are not always successful in the community. The good news is having a COE Staff Moderator helped balance some of the messaging.

—Community Advisory Board Member providing feedback on a community education session

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Facilitate novel lines of basic science research inquiry relevant to the catchment area.

The OCOE implemented a program to fund new pilot studies and/or supplement existing studies that add a new research question generated from bi-directional communication with OCOE, CAB, and/or community members. Basic science trainees who completed training and co-facilitated community education sessions were eligible. Applications stipulated the specific catchment area relevance, community-engaged communication leading to the development of the new line of inquiry, plans for extending the research beyond the pilot/supplement, and method(s) for disseminating findings

to diverse audiences (including community stakeholders). Applications were reviewed by members of the OCOE, CAB, and other senior scientists in the O’Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center. Three pilot awards (\$100,000 each) and one supplemental award (\$25,000 each) were awarded using institutional funds allocated to the associate director for COE.

Implementation Guidance

Implementation Tip

The key to our implementation success was: A small group of trainees, a curriculum with practical tips for communication to a lay audience, and discovering that conversational training was helpful to trainees. Interactive activities (i.e., role playing) were challenging, but trainees gained a better understanding of the diverse populations from the catchment area and how they might utilize the CHA network in their research and outreach.

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I wanted to get to know members of the COE and having a small group helped for sure. Also, the presentations and material were helpful and informative. I didn’t know really about the CHAs until this meeting.

—Scientist trainee on COE training program

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Implementation Tip

Virtual educational sessions and feedback were not ideal (though necessary due to the COVID-19 pandemic). The community audience’s preference was for in-person meetings. When possible, create engaging activities and have multiple methods (e.g., paper, phone, and internet forms) of disseminating materials (e.g., handouts, evaluation forms).

Sustainability Plans

Increased integration of COE into all aspects of the O’Neal Cancer Center is a key aspect of ongoing strategic

planning. The activities are being integrating into existing program activities for the OCOE, ET, and other research programs. Funds to support the pilot and supplemental

funding program have been guaranteed by leadership to continue after the initial funding period.



1. Basic scientists presenting their pilot research to community members, including CHAs, CAB, and other partners at the COE Community Dissemination Institute.
2. Scientists answering questions from the audience about their research.

Photo credit: Wynter Byrd, Photographer

Find Out More

From bench to bedside, the O'Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center is at the forefront of improving cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. Scientists and clinician-scientists at UAB have pioneered advances in chemotherapy, surgery, radiotherapy, immunotherapy, and nutrition. Community outreach efforts reach vulnerable populations by providing the region with educational and prevention programs. Find out more at:

uab.edu/onealcancercenter

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Contact

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Community outreach and engagement (COE) activities across the translational research continuum

National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated cancer centers' COE efforts should span all cancer center programs, including basic, clinical, translational, and population research. In FY20, NCI issued a call for Cancer Center Administrative Supplements to support COE activities that focus on either basic science or the translation of evidence-based interventions into community practice. The long-term goal of the supplement initiative is to build capacity for cancer centers' COE programs to adapt and implement evidence-based programs and successfully collaborate with cancer center investigators across research programs and in partnership with community members. To learn more, visit us at: <https://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/research-emphasis/coe>